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ABSTRACT

This paper presents several aspects of the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) program for refugees as it was developed at the Bilingual Educational Institute (BEI), an organization that provides refugee and ESL services in the Houston, Texas area. Background information is provided on the development of the current RSS and ESL classes and the development of their faculty. An overview of the types of materials currently used in these classes designed to prepare students for the job market are also provided. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education) (KFT)

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MEETING ESL NEEDS AT HOME AND AT WORK

A Paper presented by
Dr. Carol M. Archer
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Meeting ESL Needs at Home and at Work

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will present several aspects of the ESL program for Refugees as it has developed at the Bilingual Educational Institute (hereafter referred to as BEI), the organization that is currently awarded the grant for RSS/ESL in the Houston area by the Texas Department of Human Services-Office of Immigration and Refugee Affairs. I will first provide a brief background of the factors that influenced the development of the types of RSS/ESL classes, followed by video clips of two types of classes. I will then present a segment on faculty development. This segment consists of two parts: a description of a year long faculty development program and a description of a program designed to monitor teachers and facilitate their professional growth. Finally, I will present the three types of materials that are currently used in the RSS/ESL program. Handouts of the overhead transparencies are available.

BACKGROUND

By talking with caseworkers, instructors and the students themselves, BEI early on identified certain factors that impacted on whether or not individuals attended class. Several factors that emerged were:

Transportation
Baby Sitting
Time conflicts with work

Transportation was an issue for several reasons not the least of which is that Houston extends over an immense distance and has a poor public transportation system. Many refugees are unfamiliar with the public bus system and may work and live in distant parts of the city. All of this is true in spite of the fact that the VOLAGs responsible for resettlement attempt to place the newly arrived refugees in the area of town that has the best public transportation.

In addition, long term, consistent baby sitting is always problematic - not just as to whether a sitter is available but the cultural probability (or improbability) of the refugee actually putting their child with a "sitter". In addition, refugees might begin ESL classes during the day upon arrival in the U.S. but once they secure work, be unable to continue. While classes may also be available in the evening, the probability of attendance drops once

the individual has worked a full 8 hour day. In order to address all these factors, it was felt that if classes could be offered on the jobsite and/or at home, it would greatly support the refugee in learning basic ESL. Therefore,

BEI offers classes at VOLAG sites (these are primarily for refugees who are not working)

BEI offers classes at the apartment complexes where the refugees are living (these are offered in the morning and in the evening)

BEI offers classes at jobsites where refugees are employed (these are offered in the afternoon immediately after work).

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

Now let us examine the program of faculty development. BEI uses both former refugees as instructors as well as American born instructors. The former refugee instructors usually had a great deal of experience in teaching EFL in their native country. Last year, a comprehensive faculty development program was designed and implemented to support all of these teachers in their development as well as to give BEI some standardized way of measuring their effectiveness.

Cross Training

There were crucial elements in the program - cross training and faculty empowerment. Cross training which involves teachers training one another evolved in a very interesting way. As part of the faculty meetings, it became evident to me early on that teachers really liked sharing their "best" strategies, techniques, materials etc. with one another. Therefore, I initiated every other meeting to be one in which teachers did just that - shared or "trained" one another. Many times, I would run off copies of all they brought to the meeting and disseminated those suggestions to all participants and other faculty who could not be there.

Faculty Empowerment

Faculty empowerment involved teacher input on program needs as well as cultural sharing. This has materialized primarily in teacher input on topics for the 3-hour faculty development meetings. Outside of the first meeting (which I designed), the content of all other 3 hour meetings came from teacher input. I

then followed up and found the resources, designed and implemented the workshops. However, empowerment also emerged as refugee instructors came to be informants about their own cultural group - helping the American born instructors to understand the expectations and class dynamics of their particular culture. I have defined the outcome of these meetings as soft products and hard products.

Soft and Hard Products

Soft products included a greater sense of connectedness among faculty, an increase in teaching skills, an increase in strategies for reaching the refugee population, an increase in cultural awareness and its impact on language acquisition, and an increase in professionalism. Hard products included eight faculty development meetings of three to four hours duration during the year as well as a written guide of recommendations based on the year long program and documented teacher observations.

While it is difficult to measure such qualities as "connectedness" and cultural awareness and professionalism, informal measures such as the amount of time that teachers spent "visiting" after the formal workshops, (an average of an hour or so) the frequency with which teachers called the faculty developer (several calls per week) and an interest in participating in professional organizations as well as requests for certificates for the various workshops seem to suggest that these qualities have increased.

As far as the hard products were concerned, eight faculty development meetings occurred. The first was a three hour workshop on culture bumps in the ESL classroom, this was followed by a three hour workshop the next month on classroom creativity, the following month saw another three hour workshop with a presentation on the BEST Test and the PADAS Instrument. The next month there was a one hour classroom application session for faculty members followed by a three hour presentation on Suggestopedia and the Total Activity Approach the next month and a one hour a faculty classroom sharing session and a one hour faculty strategy sharing session the next month. The final three hour presentation on Learning Disabilities in ESL Students made a total of eight workshops during the academic year. In addition, fifteen teacher observations were made, written up and conferenced with faculty members from October 15, 1997 to the August 1998.

Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from the year's experience.

Faculty development meetings be continued. More than eight meetings per academic year becomes burdensome and fewer run the risk of losing momentum. The consistency of the meetings is important. This is particularly true of Refugee programs in which confusion is more the norm than the exception.

It is important that the faculty be told in advance about the meetings. Many of the instructors have other jobs and this is important for their planning.

A formal way of eliciting input from teachers on their needs should be devised and implemented.

Teachers be paid half their salary for attending all workshops in as much as their sharing and presence enhances the entire program.

A systematic way of teacher observation be implemented only after a period of "relationship building" has occurred.

FACULTY OBSERVATIONS

Once initial visits to the classes have occurred, teacher observations can be made. At BEI the system that was devised to monitor teachers, emerged from the Professional Development and Appraisal System, hereafter referred to as (PADAS). This is the system that was approved by the Texas Commissioner of Education to promote "quality professional development for teachers". In PADAS, teachers are evaluated in 8 different domains. However, for Refugee ESL, only 5 domains are pertinent. Those domains will be examined in detail later in this paper. Faculty are observed several times by informal "walk throughs" and at least once by a formal observation. Feed back is given for each of these times. The teachers are evaluated according to four categories of competency - (1) exceeds expectations (or almost all of the time; 90-100%) (2) proficient or most of the time - 80 to 89%) (3) below expectations of some of the time 50-79%) and (4) unsatisfactory or less than half

of the time - less than 50%. After the formal observation, the teacher will be given a form with a numerical evaluation for each of the domains during a conference with the observer. Now let us examine the domains which are used.

Domain I: Active, successful student participation in the learning process
Domain II: Learner center instruction

Domain III: Evaluation and feedback on student progress

Domain IV: Professional Communication

Domain V: Professional Development

Walkthroughs

Focus on any or all of these domains can be made during the first visits to the class or the "walkthroughs". In a walkthrough, the observer simply sits in the class and observes for approximately 15 minutes. Using notes from that observation, s/he gives feedback to the instructor. Written feedback is given to the instructor along with a conference of the observations.

Formal Observations

However, once several "walkthroughs" have been made or the teacher and observer feel the teacher is ready for a formal observation, the teacher is notified of the visit and given a faculty self report which is done by the faculty member before the observation. In this case, the observation lasts for a minimum of 30 minutes and all of the domains are included.

In practice, the "walk-through" form proved to be the most useful. The more formal visit was very time consuming and it was discovered that shorter visits that focused on specific areas were more effective. However, having the context of the larger form was important in being able to focus on specific areas.
As mentioned earlier, I spent a great deal of time simply visiting in the classes before I did even a "walk through" so as to build rapport with the instructors - this was particularly important for refugee instructors who may have not been as accustomed the concept of

"continuing professional development". Therefore, it was necessary to build a sense of trust before the program could be implemented. Now that we have examined the structure of the program and the teacher development, let's look at the materials.

MATERIALS

Currently there are two types of materials used in the program depending on whether the classes are job site classes or apartment complex classes. The apartment complex classes uses the Real Life English and/or the Crossroads series. The job site classes uses the same materials which is supplemented with materials that are specific to the company in question. These may include teacher generated material, adaptations of other materials (safety material) and materials that are specific to a particular industry such as the Contemporary Series "Make Your Mark in Food Service, Hotel Industry, Retail Jobs and Health Service. The area of materials development is one that BEI is currently focusing on so as to better tailor the materials to the needs of the specific companies. Specifically, BEI has divided the job related material development into two training programs: Job Readiness ESL and Job Related ESL Training.

Job Related ESL

In the Job Related ESL program, the specific vocabulary and work-related situations will be solicited from employers in the major work areas and the curriculum will be customized to those employers. The program will consist of two phases: a curriculum development phase and a training or implementation phase. In the curriculum development phase, a curriculum specialist and program supervisor meet with the industry to assess the employers' needs, then match these needs with the participants' experience and language ability. A training syllabus will be developed, incorporating linguistic skills training with the specific knowledge requirement at the work place. The students will learn to identify accurately their job description, the vocabulary needed to perform the tasks, and the responsibilities toward their work mates, supervisors and employers. They will also learn to identify their rights as workers; salary ad compensation, safety issues as well as the culture of the workplace.

Job Readiness ESL

In the Job Readiness ESL Training Program, the participants learn to identify their skills and experience, to describe their needs and

requirements as well as to identify jobs that are appropriate to their experience and skills. In addition they will learn to identify job requirements, employers' expectations rules and regulations, and workers' rights and responsibilities. They will learn the protocol of a job interview and American work ethics. Emphasis will be on verbal communication, including listening and comprehension skills with some written work included.

1. Expressing personal educational and work experience:

Practice: Compile list of experience and skills. Write want ad, advertising their own skills. Cut out job ads and compile list of possible positions. Call up employer for more information and make list of job prospects.

2. Job market and application process:

Practice: Write own job description. Collect job application forms and complete them. Compile list of resources for skills upgrade. Write a letter replying to an ad.

3. Preparation and Presentation for job applicants:

Practice: Compile list of do's and don'ts in an interview. Write own resume and cover letter. Make appointment for interview. Mock interviews.

CONCLUSION

A final personal note - working on this program was at times frustrating, discouraging (even maddening!) but ultimately a very rewarding experience both personally and professionally. I came away from this experience with an enormous sense of awe at witnessing the magic of teaching - that amazing moment when teacher and student meet and learning occurs. The amount of patience, skill, intuitiveness and heart that ESL teachers bring to their daily work is inspiring.